

How to Minimize Negative Effects of Divorce on Your Children: Reduce the Conflict

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So sorry you are facing a divorce with the parent of your children! I'm sure you have noticed by now that this can be an overwhelming process. In addition, you have likely been dealing with the emotions and stress for some time now. Oftentimes, divorce begins months and even years before the actual decree of divorce is issued. And during this time, you've likely been wondering how all this will affect your family. What will your familial situation look like going forward? How will your children react to your new family situation?

Yes, there are many ways that divorce may affect your children, from changing homes to more financial stress to possibly losing regular contact with a parent, and more. Raising children in the best of circumstances is challenging; doing so while adjusting to divorce can seem daunting. Of course, every family situation is different, so what works for one family may not work for another. But one thing that researchers agree on is the importance of minimizing conflict between parents.

Interparental Conflict and Parenting

A very common form of conflict in a family is disagreement between the parents, known as interparental conflict (IPC). Separating from whom you thought was the love of your life can be very upsetting. Oftentimes, there is a lot of blame that abounds in the separation. In divorce, there are typically high levels of IPC. IPC usually contributes to a host of developmental challenges for children following divorce. Frequent and intense IPC can further fray the fragile relationship with your ex-spouse and lead to lower quality parenting, including:

- Lower levels of parental support for your children.
- Lack of parental monitoring and structure (for example, knowing a child's whereabouts).
- Less parental warmth.
- More hostile parenting.
- Lower quality of parent-child relationships.
- More frequent parent-child conflicts.

Changes in parenting behaviors are usually due to the parents being preoccupied with their own life changes and emotions. Regardless, children want to feel loved and when they don't, they may draw some irrational conclusions, such as the divorce was their fault or that they are *bad* because their parents are not as affectionate with them. In addition, consistent supervision and discipline is important to ensure the children engage in good behaviors and stay away from delinquent activities and behaviors.

Best Practices

But several good practices can give your family the best chance at adjusting positively after an upheaval of life. Some practices that researchers suggest to help children adjust after a divorce are:

- **Minimize conflict.** Especially try to minimize interparental conflict. Don't badmouth your ex-spouse in front of your children or put them in the middle of your disagreements. Overall, avoid engaging them in arguments that may result in triangulation, which is a term researchers use for when one parent is making an effort to team up with the child against the other parent.
- **Minimize stress.** Minimize the extent to which stress affects your family. You can do so by starting to minimize conflict. How? Become more aware of what the arguments are about and if it is truly necessary for you to declare "World War III." For your own peace of mind, consider that sometimes it might be

easier to let others have their way, so long as the arrangements are reasonable and no one is hurt.

- **Get some help.** #If you cannot get along with your ex-spouse, use a professional mediator to settle disputes; do not put your children in the middle of a dispute or have them courier messages back and forth.
- **Let your children be children.** Even though you may need help with household chores, your oldest child (or most responsible child) was not meant to be your emotional supporter or confidant. Find someone else to be your emotional supporter.
- **Provide structure and consistency for your children.** #Focus on being an anchor for your children and it will help them deal with the uncertainties of the future. #As much as possible, reduce unnecessary transitions. Try to keep your children in the same house, school, church, etc. Keep their routines as consistent as possible during the transition.

Children's Resiliency

It can be scary to think about all the negative consequences of divorce. There is so much stress and uncertainty that comes with the events that surround divorce. But remember this hopeful news: children are usually resilient. Yes, divorce can be hard on children but the research shows that most children adjust and do well over time. The negative effects of divorce are strongest during the actual process of divorce and the first year or so. As time passes, children generally are less affected by divorce as they begin to adjust to their new life around them. #And when you and your former spouse can eliminate the interparental conflict and work together as co-parents for the welfare of your children, then there is a good chance the children will be okay.